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ABSTRACT

Preparing and telling stories in the classroom is fun for both teacher and student, and stories have great value as motivational tools to enhance instruction. Students who have difficulty recalling facts from the textbook easily remember the concepts that are contained within a story. Stories seem to provide frameworks that aid understanding and retention. This Fastback offers tips for using storytelling in middle grade classrooms, noting that having students do the storytelling may have greater motivational benefit than having the teacher tell the stories to the students. The Fastback states that storytelling by students helps to develop higher-level thinking skills, such as analysis and synthesis, as well as skills in oral composition. It is divided into the following sections: Telling Stories in the Classroom; Stories and the Middle Grades; Everyone Can Be a Storyteller (Choosing the Right Story; Getting Started; Additional Tips); Storytelling in the Content Fields (Storytelling in the Social Studies; Family Stories; Storytelling in the Language Arts; Storytelling in Mathematics; Storytelling in the Sciences); More Stories for the Content Areas (Social Studies; Language Arts; Mathematics; Science); Character Education: The Moral of the Story; and The End of Our Story. Lists 67 books and 2 periodicals as resources. (NKA)

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482 FASTBACK

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Storytelling for Middle Grades Students

John Myers and
Robert Hilliard

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John W. Myers and Robert D. Hilliard

John W. Myers is a professor of middle grades education at the State University of West Georgia in Carrollton. A native of Akron, Ohio, he holds a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in English. His Ph.D. in secondary education is from the University of Akron.

Myers has been an eighth-grade English teacher in North Canton, Ohio; a professor at Tennessee Tech University in Cookeville; and the academic dean at Father Ryan High School in Nashville, Tennessee. His publications include numerous articles, monographs, and editorial projects related to language arts and middle grades education. He also is the author of two previous fastbacks: 209 *Writing to Learn Across the Curriculum* and 346 *Making Sense of Whole Language*.

Robert D. Hilliard is an associate professor of middle grades education at the State University of West Georgia. He attended Lindenwood College on speech and drama scholarships. He holds a master's degree in secondary education and an Ed.D. in curriculum and instruction from the University of Arkansas.

Hilliard has been a speech and English teacher in grades eight through 12, a central office administrator, and a college professor. A member of the Cherokee Rose Storytelling Festival in Carrollton, Hilliard currently chairs this program, which annually brings storytellers to 3,000 to 4,000 students, teachers, and aspiring storytellers.

Series Editor, Donovan R. Walling

Storytelling for Middle Grades Students

by
John W. Myers
and
Robert D. Hilliard

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Table of Contents

Telling Stories in the Classroom 7

Stories and the Middle Grades 10

Everyone Can Be a Storyteller 13
- Choosing the Right Story 13
- Getting Started 15
- Additional Tips 17

Storytelling in the Content Fields 19
- Storytelling in the Social Studies 19
- Family Stories 20
- Storytelling in the Language Arts 22
- Storytelling in Mathematics 23
- Storytelling in the Sciences 24

More Stories for the Content Areas 26
- Social Studies 26
- Language Arts 28
- Mathematics 29
- Science 31

Character Education: The Moral of the Story ... 34

The End of Our Story 39

Resources 41

Telling Stories in the Classroom

Once upon a time, there were two brothers. One boy was named Truth, and the other was named Story. Truth was rather plain in appearance, dressed very simply, and was always straightforward in speaking with others. Story, on the other hand, was colorful in appearance and manner, with an air of mystery about him. He dressed in bright colors, often acted with enthusiasm, and was dramatic in talking with others.

Truth was the wiser of the brothers. Indeed, he possessed great knowledge, and he wished to go out into the world to share his wisdom. Because he hated deception and falsehood in all its forms, he chose to go forth naked onto the highways and byways. When he tried to stop travelers on the road, however, instead of listening to his wisdom, they fled in dismay. Finally, exasperated by his lack of success, he returned home and confided his disappointment to his brother. Story knew exactly what to do. He dressed his brother in brightly colored clothing, adorned him with bright jewels, and encouraged him to be a bit more tactful in his approach.

Truth returned to the highways and approached travelers as he had before — but this time, they stopped and

listened attentively to what he said. After spreading his wisdom far and wide, he returned to his brother and thanked him for his help.

Moral: Nobody wants to hear to the naked truth, but when Truth comes dressed as Story, everyone listens.

All of us are storytellers. Everyone has a story. Some of us have extensive experience telling stories, jokes, or family tales. Others are just curious to know more about the art of storytelling and the extent to which it may enhance teaching.

When we ask an audience how many people consider themselves storytellers, only a few raise their hands. But ask how many have storytellers in their families, and many hands go up. When asked to relate a favorite story told by a friend or relative, people move naturally into a storytelling mode.

The role of storyteller, and that of listener, is part of what we are. It is ingrained in the fabric of human life. Everyone loves a story. It makes no difference whether the story begins "Once upon a time," or "A zebra and a penguin walked into a bar," or "Guess who I saw at the mall last night?"

Preparing and telling stories in the classroom is fun for both teacher and student, and stories have great value as motivational tools to enhance instruction. Students who have difficulty recalling facts from the textbook easily remember the concepts that are contained within a story. Stories seem to provide frameworks that aid understanding and retention. That is only one of the gifts of storytelling.

It is no coincidence that the *American Heritage Dictionary* defines the term "history" first as "a narrative of events, a story." We are, as essayist Roger Rosenblatt points out in *Time* magazine, "a narrative species." History — be it that of a civilization, a nation, a family, or an individual — is based in story. We are a people of story, and we know one another through our stories.

Most children become aware early of fairytales and, later, of other classics of children's literature. Before they become independent readers, they are listeners. They then move on to the role of storyteller. It's part of living.

9

Stories and the Middle Grades

The middle grades (ages 10 to 14) are times of tremendous change. It is a time when children begin to move toward adulthood and shift their focus from within to what is happening around them. Just listen to them talk in school hallways. They share stories about one another — who likes whom, what happened Friday night, who was at the mall on Saturday.

Middle school students like stories in which their predictions of outcome are led in one direction by the action, only to be foiled by a surprise ending or twist in plot. They thrive on mythology and epic literature. Developmentally, they are at an age when they can handle tales in which characters face more than one problem. They are ready for most adult content but prefer stories with surprise elements, a touch of clever slapstick, and a smattering of the tall tale.

Read-aloud approaches (teachers reading stories to students) are very appropriate in the middle grades and are one of the most effective techniques available for developing successful readers (Lesesne 1998, p. 246).

Because reading aloud is basically the telling of a story from written text, as opposed to memory, it should follow that what makes read-aloud effective also applies to storytelling.

Storytelling can be the bait for reeling in reluctant readers. As middle-grades teachers, the authors enticed students into completing their literature assignments, and into reading for pleasure, by telling part of the story in the text or a book. Unlike traditional book talks, which are book reviews of a sort, these abbreviated stories led to a climax, then stopped. If the students took the bait and became interested in the story, the only way they could find out what happened next was to read for themselves.

Facts and concepts can be dry fare. If we want students to listen attentively and remember, one of the most effective strategies is to tell a story. Mooney and Holt quote teacher Roberta Simpson Brown, who relates her success in using storytelling to reach her "at-risk" students: "It's an extremely difficult group of kids to reach. If I'm just their teacher, they don't respond nearly as well, but if I tell stories, they are really hooked on them. They hardly move while a story is being told" (1996, p. 142). According to Hamilton and Weiss, "Storytelling is the oldest form of education" (1990, p. 1).

Storytelling as an instructional tool is not limited to particular content areas. Most teachers clearly see the possibilities for language arts and social studies at the middle level, but stories have applications in science, math, art, music, foreign language, and character education.

While stories may be told by teachers or students just for entertainment, they also provide numerous other

instructional benefits. According to Hamilton and Weiss (1990, pp. 3-9), listening to stories affects children in several ways. Stories:

- Stimulate the imagination.
- Help develop a love of language.
- Motivate children to read.
- Improve listening skills.
- Improve other language skills.
- Broaden vocabulary.
- Are effective prompts for creative writing.
- Stimulate emotional development.
- Create an awareness of our own and other cultures.

It should be noted that having middle-level students do the storytelling may have greater motivational benefit than having the teacher tell the stories to the students. Storytelling by students helps to develop higher-level thinking skills, such as analysis and synthesis, as well as skills in oral composition. Sharing of *personal* stories by middle-level students also helps develop self-awareness, self-esteem, and confidence (Hamilton and Weiss 1990; Roe, Alfred, and Smith 1998).

Students are willing storytellers. Once they are introduced to the practice in the classroom, they will enthusiastically share personal experiences with peers, share stories related to classroom activities and interests, and gain status in the group (Roe, Alfred, and Smith 1998, p. 16).

Everyone Can Be a Storyteller

Experienced storytellers assure teachers that no special skills are required for storytelling in the classroom. Storytelling is not so much a performance as it is a universal form of communication. "Storytelling isn't about words. It's about images and emotions" (Norfolk and Norfolk 1999, p. 24). That is to say, it's second nature for both the teller and the listeners. And the benefits for students are great.

To a certain extent, we are all born storytellers. From the time we can speak, we tell our stories and we enjoy the stories of others. However, becoming an effective storyteller in the classroom requires preparation. In this section we offer a general process for selecting, preparing, and telling stories effectively, along with some tips from several professionals.

Choosing the Right Story

Choosing the right story requires the teller to be aware of two elements: the goals to be met and the nature of the audience.

When telling stories to middle-level students, teachers and student storytellers may want to meet a variety of goals. These may include entertaining, introducing a type of literature, providing background for a new study topic, encouraging self-exploration, or reflecting on some ethical or moral issue (Roe, Alfred, and Smith 1998).

Choosing the best story to meet one's goals is key to the effectiveness of the storytelling experience for the audience. Fortunately, many resources are available. A few are mentioned in this fastback; others may be found in story collections, books on storytelling techniques, and folklore anthologies; or they may come from one's friends and neighbors. There also are specialized collections of stories aimed at building positive attitudes toward diversity, for example, or encouraging moral behavior.

It is important to choose a story that you enjoy. The storyteller's attitude toward a story is reflected in the telling. Enthusiasm is hard to fake.

As important as choosing a story that meets one's goals is understanding one's audience. A storyteller must match the story to the audience, taking into consideration the age and interests of the listeners. Long, complex stories, especially for inexperienced audiences and storytellers, generally are best avoided at the middle level. Developmentally, these students are likely to enjoy stories that approximate the length and complexity of folktales, tall tales, legends, and myths. Of course, as every middle-level teacher knows, this age group is extremely diverse in maturity, interests, and literacy.

Generally speaking, shorter stories are most effective. Some storytellers recommend that, when dealing with children, story length should be calculated at one minute per year of the listener's age. Thus stories that run 10 to 15 minutes are probably best for this age group. You should finish telling the story before your audience finishes listening to it.

A story has value only when the audience is involved (MacDonald 1993). Tone of voice, gestures, and pace of delivery are all important to holding the audience's attention during the story. Cabral and Manduca suggest beginning a storytelling session with visual actions that focus the attention of the listeners: "When I am about to engage a group, I might slowly look over both shoulders and hunch over toward my listeners as if I'm going to tell them a secret. When I do this, I convey to them that what I'm saying is important and that they are important and that is why I'm sharing this story with them" (1997, p. 221).

Getting Started

Every storyteller has his or her own style. According to Roe, Alfred, and Smith (1998), professionals have a common process for preparing to tell a story:

The storyteller must understand the story and its logical sequence of actions. Stories should be read or listened to carefully, with reflection on the characters and the action. The teller should mentally picture the characters and mentally take them through the sequence of actions. A timeline for the action sequence may be useful. Special

attention should be paid to how the story begins and ends because these are key parts of any story. The beginning hooks the listener and sets the stage, tone, and direction for the story; the ending ties up the loose ends, brings closure, and solidifies the story's effect on the listener.

The storyteller must practice telling the story. The goal is to internalize the story so that it will flow in the teller's own words. Stories are not committed to memory, word for word. Many retellings are required, during which the teller plays with words and images, refining them to produce desired effects on the intended audience. Rereading or listening to the story from time to time also is recommended. Audiotaping or (better yet) videotaping the practice is helpful. With videotape, the storyteller can check nonverbal communication. For example, too many gestures or an apparent lack of enthusiasm can be spotted easily. Both audio and video recordings will help the storyteller reflect on the pace of the story. If the story is told too quickly, listeners may be left behind; if too slowly, they may lose interest. An effective teller slows down to add suspense and speeds up during a thrilling chase. Practice dialects, if appropriate.

The storyteller must practice with a live audience. Impose on friends, peers, and family. Seek feedback. Acting in front of the mirror is very different from a live audience. With an audience, the storyteller's perception of time may be different. The storyteller may fly through a story, thinking that the pace is slower than it actually is. Stage fright makes a difference, but practicing with an audience reduces its effect. This also is an opportunity for

the teller to be sure that the characters and sequence of actions are clear to the listener.

Practice, practice, practice. Tell the story while adding gestures, practicing phrasing, and pausing for effect. Play with vocal intonations. Practice in the shower and on your evening walk. Work at it until you feel you are ready for an audience, then go find one. Pay attention to how you appear visually; you are the visual element of the story.

Additional Tips

What happens when the storyteller leaves something out? If it's not essential to the story, the professionals recommend that the teller keep on with the story. Too many detours will confuse the audience. If an omission is essential to the story, and it is discovered before it is needed for recall by the listeners, the best plan is simply to regroup with; "Oh. I forgot to tell you that . . ." If the omission is not caught in time, the effect of the story on the listeners will be adversely affected.

Avoid weak beginnings and abrupt endings. An effective storyteller may choose to adopt standard phrases that will cue an audience. Some storytellers recommend that you memorize your opening and closing lines and the story's sequence of action. It may help to begin by cuing the audience. Asking them a question is a good hook ("Did you ever. . .?"). That old standby, "Once upon a time," tells an audience that a story is coming. Likewise, a concluding phrase can signal the end of the story ("And that's the last time that bear was seen on

the frontier."). At the end of a story, the audience should be reflecting on the story, not thinking, "Is that the end?"

Younger audiences tend to have questions as the story progresses and may try to interrupt. You may want to preface the story with a comment that there will be time for questions after the telling. One of the authors vividly remembers telling an adapted story from Edgar Allan Poe in a darkened eighth-grade classroom. At a climactic moment, the teller paused, and — as if planned in advance — a student inserted a cute comment, destroying the effect of the story.

Feel free to experiment with props, masks, or costumes. They contribute to the visual interest. Storytellers may dress the part when they tell stories of Native Americans. The suspense of telling a story like the Poe classic, "The Monkey's Paw," is greatly enhanced by the presence of a suitable "paw" shown to the audience.

Be sure to allow enough volume to suit the size of the audience and the acoustics of the room. Especially with younger audiences, it is important that the story be heard, even at those times when hushed tones need to be projected.

Storytelling in the Content Fields

Often, the best way to use a story in teaching content is to introduce new concepts or topics in the story. A story may be just what is needed to whet student interest. Perhaps a story involving the application of a principle of physical science or an excerpt from the real-life experience of a scientist or mathematician, an historical figure, or an author may lead to a desire for further knowledge. We can pull text from biography, from stories and folktales, and from history and tell the story orally to hook our listeners.

Storytelling in the Social Studies

The award-winning *Lincoln: A Photobiography* by Russell Freedman is written in such a way as to create a real person in the minds of readers, especially young readers. He writes of Lincoln:

> Abraham Lincoln wasn't the sort of man who could lose himself in a crowd. After all, he stood six feet four inches tall, and to top it off, he wore a high silk hat. His

height was mostly in his bony legs. When he sat in a chair, he seemed no taller than anyone else. It was only when he stood up that he towered above other men. At first glance, most people thought he was homely. Lincoln thought so too, referring once to his "poor, lean, lank face." As a young man he was sensitive about his gawky looks, but in time he learned to laugh at himself. When a rival called him "two-faced" during a political debate, Lincoln replied: "I leave it to my audience. If I had another face, do you think I'd wear this one?" (1987, p. 1).

Any typically self-conscious middle school boy is likely to see himself in this description. Like many middle-schoolers, Lincoln dealt with the problem of image. The lesson for young adolescents is that young Lincoln developed a healthy self-image, made the best of his situation, and went on to become the leader of his nation. Middle school students may relate to this picture of Mr. Lincoln and want to know more.

Family Stories

Everyone has a story, even your students. One way to capitalize on this is to encourage the telling of "family stories." These may be personal stories of something that happened to the student, or they may be stories that have been passed down through the generations. Often, these may be used to provide relevant personal ties to historical events or persons.

Students may be asked to interview family members, learning firsthand stories related to important times in our history. Indeed, this is the secret of Ken Burns' success with his splendid documentaries. His use of

personal stories brings human relevance to otherwise abstract events. The same may be said of Tom Brokaw's recent bestsellers, *The Greatest Generation* and *The Greatest Generation Speaks*. These stories of individuals are essentially family stories. Teachers can initiate such student inquiry by sharing their own family stories.

One of the authors of this fastback has developed a format called, "Tales from the Trunk." In an old family trunk, he has gathered objects, including a quilt and the horns of an ox, that have had significance in his family's history. The quilt relates to the historical event that changed the lives of the Cherokee nation — the "Trail of Tears." The quilt was made by a Cherokee woman for her daughter, and it made the terrible journey from Georgia to Oklahoma. Its original owner was one of 3,000 who died of cold and starvation on that trek. Before her death, she passed the quilt to her 13-year-old daughter.

The same quilt visited the California gold fields around 1848. The owners found gold and traveled back to the Oklahoma Indian Territory by way of Cape Horn, landing at New Orleans and traveling up the Mississippi River to Memphis. At Memphis, they bought a wagon and a team of white horses for the triumphant journey home. During the Civil War, the quilt was buried to keep it safe from marauders and scavengers.

The ox horns belonged to an animal that pulled the wagon of the author's great-grandfather, who came to Kansas in 1861, just after statehood was proclaimed. The horns hung in a place of honor in his grandparents' home until their deaths, and then passed to the author.

Storytelling in the Language Arts

Storytelling introduces listening and speaking into the language arts curriculum. The abundance of folktales and stories from other cultures promotes diversity in the study of literature and offers abundant opportunities for integrating language arts and social studies. And, as mentioned earlier, a story can be a strong motivator for getting students to read.

Stories also are an excellent means for introducing new vocabulary. You may pre-teach new words before telling the story, integrate a brief comment on the new words into the story itself, or discuss them after the story. If you choose to insert comment into the story, limit yourself to two to three new words, since too much emphasis on the words may destroy the story's continuity.

There are also specialized stories that can be used to increase vocabulary. One wonderful book, *The Weighty Word Book* by Levitt, Burger, and Guralnick (1985), teaches 26 "weighty" words. Below is a paraphrase of the entry for the letter "B."

> Once upon a time there were two sisters, Josephine and Kate, identical twins who did everything together. When they grew up, they lived in the same house and had identical jobs with the same company. They even took their vacations together. One year, however, they simply could not agree on a vacation site. One wanted to visit France, and the other wanted to go to Alaska. They argued and argued but could not agree. They decided to take separate vacations.
>
> Well, it was tradition that their friends gathered to see them off on vacation. But this year the planes to

France and Alaska were departing at exactly the same time, but from opposite ends of the airport. The friends were distressed, but they solved the problem by saying a "bye" to Josephine, then dashing to the other gate to say a separate "bye" for Kate.

So, whenever something or someone divides into two parts, remember the friends who had to say one "bye" for Josephine and a separate "bye" for Kate, and you will remember the word *bifurcate*.

Storytelling in Mathematics

Word problems often are difficult for middle-graders, but they are good opportunities to teach critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. For example, take this story based on G. Shannon's "Dividing the Horses" (1985).

Once upon a time, a farmer was making out his will. He told his lawyer, "When I die, I want my wife to get the house and the land. My eldest son will get half of what I own, my second son will get one-third, and my youngest will get one-ninth."

A few weeks later, when the farmer had passed away unexpectedly, his wife and three sons met with the lawyer for the reading of the will. To their surprise, they found that the entire estate consisted of the house, the land, and 17 mules. They tried and they tried, but none of them could figure out how to divide the estate to meet the requirements that their deceased father had set.

It was the wife who finally figured it out. She borrowed one more mule from a neighbor, and put it in the field with the other 17. She then divided the 18 mules by two, and gave the eldest son his 9 mules. The second

son got his one-third, 6 mules. And finally the youngest got one-ninth, or 2 mules.

Now, everyone knows that nine plus six plus two equals seventeen. She then took the extra mule and returned it to her neighbor. Problem solved! . . . or is it?

Storytelling in the Sciences

The importance of many scientific principles can be illustrated by a story, true or fictional. They may be in the form of problems to be solved or simply interesting stories about the lives of famous scientists. Sir Isaac Newton, who made significant contributions to both science and math, is a particularly interesting case.

Newton's powers of concentration were extraordinary. When focused on a problem or idea, he could hardly be disturbed. Sometimes the ability to completely focus and shut out external influences was mistaken for absent-mindedness. One evening Newton gave a dinner party for several friends. When the wine ran low, he excused himself to get another bottle from his study. When he didn't return, his guests waited patiently for a while, then went in search of their host. They found him sitting in his study with the unopened bottle of wine nearby. He had gotten an idea while in the study and had stopped to write it down. In the process, he completely forgot about dinner and his guests. Another time, Newton was observed leading his horse uphill by the reins. This would not have been noteworthy had the horse been at the end of the reins. Unfortunately, the horse had slipped away at the bottom of the hill. Newton did not notice until he turned to mount the horse at the top of the hill. All that, and still recognized

by many as perhaps the greatest mathematician and scientist of all time. (Reimer and Reimer 1990)

25

More Stories for the Content Areas

Social Studies

The True Story of Christopher Seider. Adapted from Jenkins (1995). One true story of the American Revolution is especially appropriate for middle-level students.

It was a cold, windy, February day in Boston. Christopher Seider's mother had to call him three times and threaten him with the strap before he finally crawled out of his warm bed to get ready for school. Eleven-year-old Christopher didn't want to get up, but he did. He dressed hurriedly in the chilly room, so cold that he could see his breath. And he knew that the schoolroom would be cold, too. Only those who sat near the potbellied stove would be warm, and his seat was far across the room. Last week, the ink in his inkwell had been frozen for a full day. But the cold was not the only reason Christopher did not want to go to school.

These were troubled times in the each of the 13 Colonies. The British government had recently passed a new tax, which raised the cost of many goods. The additional money did not benefit the people in the

Colonies. It was all sent to England. People in Boston and other cities were upset and argued against "taxation without representation." The Colonists had no role in their own governance and were at the mercy of the King.

From the time Christopher was six years old, he had seen riots in the streets of Boston. He walked past the hated "Red Coats" on his way to school. To make matters worse, off-duty British soldiers often worked at civilian jobs for less wages than the local citizenry. People said it wasn't fair. Tempers ran strong, and fights were common.

As Christopher walked to school that morning, he saw some older boys stopping to put rocks in their pockets. Something was going to happen. Curious, Christopher followed the boys away from the school to a house two blocks away. They stopped in front of a two-story house, and one boy called out a name: "Ebenezer Richardson. Ebenezer Richardson!" There was no answer from the house. Some of the boys threw snowballs at the windows of the house. And Christopher just watched. Then several boys called again — "Ebenezer Richardson!" — and a stone was thrown through an upstairs window.

Christopher was transfixed. He didn't see the barrel of the musket that appeared at the broken window. He didn't see the flame as the musket fired. He didn't hear the crack of the musket echo down the street. He didn't see British sympathizer Ebenezer Richardson standing beyond the broken window, musket in hand.

Christopher Seider didn't see anything, ever again. He lay on the ground, warm red blood running from his body into the white snow. That morning, February

22, 1770, 11-year-old Christopher Seider, who had skipped school, became one of the first victims of what we call the American Revolution.

Language Arts

Often, the stories of authors' lives are as interesting as the works they create. Here is an adaptation of a true story about two famous poets and a novelist (Roe, Alfred, and Smith 1998). It is also effective in talking with students about the difficulties in getting started as a writer.

Sometime in the early 1800s, Mary Wollstonecraft ran off from her home in London with the famous English poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley, who was married at the time. In the summer of 1816, they were living in a villa in Geneva, Switzerland; and another famous poet, George Noel Gordon (better known as Lord Byron) moved into the villa next door.

Soon the three, with a few other friends, were meeting each evening to talk and socialize. Percy and George were excellent writers and storytellers, and it soon became the habit for the group for each person to write a short ghost story and tell it at the evening gathering.

Mary, however, was frustrated. As hard as she tried, she could not come up with a story idea. Then one night, the discussion turned to the "nature and principal of life" and whether a person once dead might be restored to life by some scientific process. That night, Mary had a frightening dream about a scientist who makes a creature from dead human body parts and brings it to life. The creature then turned on his creator and pursued him. At this scary moment, Mary awakened afraid. She

quickly realized, however, that the dream that had scared her so badly could be the basis for a story the next evening. The story was a hit with the group, and she decided to try to publish it as a short story. Percy, however, convinced her to enlarge the story and publish it as a novel. And so she did. Not yet 19 years old, Mary wrote one of the most highly regarded novels in the world and became known as the inventor of science fiction. Her novel? *Frankenstein*.

Mathematics

The King's Commissioners. Adapted from a story by Aileen Friedman (1994).

Once upon a time, a King fell into the habit of appointing a commissioner to deal with problems that arose in the kingdom. Unfortunately, he did not restrict the practice to serious problems. He had a Commissioner for Flat Tires, one for Chicken Pox, and another for Things that Go Bump in the Night. This official had been appointed when the young Princess was having nightmares. In fact, he appointed so many of these royal commissioners that he had no idea how many there were.

One day he decided that he needed to get organized. He called in his First and Second Royal Advisors and told them that all royal commissioners must report to the castle the following day. They would march in single file through the throne room, and he and his two advisors would count them. This seemed the best way to begin.

The next day, the commissioners marched through, and the King began to count. First came the Commis-

29

sioner for Spilt Milk, who had been quite busy when the Princess was a baby. Next came the Commissioner for Lost Homework, who was very busy now that the Princess was in seventh grade. And, so on — 1, 2, 3, 4. . . . But, just as the King got to 18, he was interrupted by his daughter; and, of course, he lost count. But he wasn't concerned, for his two advisors had continued to count.

When the last one, the Commissioner for Late Arrivals, passed through, the King turned to his First Royal Advisor and asked, "How many are there?"

The First Advisor replied, "Well, your highness, I made a tally mark for each commissioner and then circled the marks by twos." He showed the King his notepad and said, "There are 23 twos and one more."

"That doesn't tell me anything," the King roared angrily, "I want to know how many commissioners I have all together!"

He turned to the Second Royal Advisor and asked, "How many did you count?"

That advisor replied, "Well, Sire, I also made a tally mark for each commissioner, but I put the marks in groups of five." He showed the tally marks to the King, adding, "I got 9 fives and two more, and that . . ."

"Stop!" said the King. "That tells me nothing. I want to know how many commissioners I have all together."

At that point, the Princess broke in. "Daddy, Daddy, let me," pleaded the Princess.

After a pause, the King said, "Very well, my dear; you may give it a try."

"First," the Princess said, "have the advisors line the commissioners up with 10 per row. Then, I can count them."

And so the commissioners were arranged in rows of 10. There were four rows, with seven commissioners left

over. The Princess walked to the end of the first row and counted. "Ten," she said; then she moved to the second row and said, "Twenty," and so on. "Thirty. Forty. Plus seven makes 47," she concluded. The King was pleased.

"But, your majesty," said the First Royal Advisor, "that's the same total I got; 23 twos make 46, plus one makes 47."

"I got 47 too," said the Second Royal Advisor, "9 fives make 45, plus two is 47."

The King looked confused, but the Princess explained it to him one more time.

"After all, Daddy," she said, "you can count in lots of ways." She had learned that in her math class at school.

"Well," said the King, "I think I'll appoint one more Commissioner, a Commissioner to Keep Count of the Royal Commissioners." And the King looked at his daughter and said, "I'd offer the job to you, if you weren't so busy at school."

"Get real, Daddy," she replied "I'm a Princess. I don't do manual labor."

Science

"The Crow and the Pitcher." This story, adapted from a fable by Aesop, can be used effectively to introduce concepts related to the volume and displacement of water.

Once upon a time, a thirsty crow sat on the grass staring at a half-filled pitcher. The pitcher contained pure water, and the crow very much wanted a drink. When he perched on the edge of the pitcher, however, he could not reach the level of the water with his beak. He knew

31

that if he tipped the pitcher over, the water would quickly soak into the earth and be lost. He thought and thought and finally had a plan. He began gathering large pebbles until he had a sizable stack next to the pitcher. Then, one by one, he carefully dropped each pebble into the pitcher. As each sank slowly to the bottom, the level of the water began to rise. Finally, the water reached the brim of the pitcher, and the crow was satisfied. He drank his fill and flew away refreshed. The moral, of course, is that necessity is the mother of invention.

"Hanson Gregory and the Fried Cakes." Adapted from Roe, Alfred, and Smith (1998). Speaking of the mother of invention, there are many interesting true stories about inventions and their inventors. In this story, we meet Hanson Gregory, whose name has been forgotten by most, but whose invention is known and enjoyed by all.

Hanson Gregory loved the fried cakes that his mother prepared for him. On a cold Maine morning, they were especially delicious. The only drawback to the cakes was that the centers often remained soggy and doughy. One day, while helping his mother in the kitchen, Hanson wondered what might happen if the centers of the cake were removed. And so, as his mother prepared to fry the next batch, Hanson used a fork to poke a large hole in the middle of each. Both he and his mother were pleased with the result.

As an adult, Hanson Gregory was a sailor; and everywhere he traveled, he prepared these tasty fried cakes for his friends and shipmates. He shared the recipe; and over the years, the fame of Gregory's fried cakes grew.

Today Hanson Gregory is credited with the invention of the special type of fried cake that we know as the "donut."

33

Character Education: The Moral of the Story

Throughout the ages, writers have addressed issues of character in literature. Perhaps the first writer on "character education" was Aesop. His fables always had a moral related to character. Whether we look at the shades of character represented in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, or a novel by Judy Bloom, it is evident that issues of character have always been a staple of literature.

Today, character education is in the news; and some states (Georgia, for example) have adopted formal character education curricula for the public schools. Such scholars as Tom Lickona and others have written widely on the topic, and such pundits as William Bennett have advocated virtues to the general public. Bennett's *Book of Virtues* has given rise to a television cartoon series, "Stories from the Book of Virtues," and there are many imitators.

In view of the widespread interest in the topic and the obvious possibilities for the use of stories in promoting character, it seems fitting to include a story or

two suited to the purpose. Developmentally, middle-graders are the ideal audience for this approach.

Some storytellers might modify certain stories to downplay violence. The old story of "Little Red Riding Hood" can be modified easily to have the wolf lock Grandma in the closet, rather than devouring her. In other cases — "The Three Billy Goats Gruff," for example — the storyteller may want to focus discussion after the story on possible nonviolent solutions to the confrontations in the story. The same approach can be used to initiate discussion of stereotypes and other issues.

The following stories illustrate specific virtues or character traits.

Resourcefulness.

> Mary wanted to serve the tea one afternoon as her mother was entertaining, and she wanted to do it all herself. She asked her mother to stay out of the kitchen and let her do it alone. Mary's mother crossed her fingers and hoped for the best. Finally, Mary emerged from the kitchen with the tea, poured it without incident for all present, then settled down with a glass of water for herself. After the party, Mary's mother complimented her but asked why it had taken so long in the kitchen. Mary replied, "I couldn't find the tea strainer."
>
> "Then how did you strain it so well?" asked her mother.
>
> "I used the fly swatter," Mary replied.

Strength. Adapted from a story of the Limba people of West Africa, related by Margaret MacDonald.

> Once upon a time, the animals of the jungle decided to have a contest to see who was the strongest. The con-

test was the elephant's idea; and, of course, he expected to win. And so they came together to demonstrate their strength.

The chimpanzee strutted around saying: "*Strength*! See these muscles; that's strength!" The deer arrived and proudly proclaimed, "Look at these leg muscles! now that's *strength*!" The leopard showed his claws and said, "See these claws; that's *strength*."

Each animal showed his unique skills and defined them as strength. This posturing ended as the elephant said, "The word 'elephant' means strength," and simply sat down. They were waiting for the last animal to arrive. They were waiting on man. When man arrived, each animal performed a deed to demonstrate his strength. The chimpanzee swung from tree to tree; the deer ran like the wind. Each one performed and claimed, "That is strength!" Finally, the elephant ripped up a tree with its trunk, and most of the animals acknowledged that *that* was strength. The elephant thought he had the contest won, for only one creature remained: Man.

Man performed a variety of deeds. He climbed a tree, but the chimpanzee had done it better. He ran, but the deer was much faster. The animals chided man for his weakness, saying, "That's *not strength*!"

Now man became angry. "Strength! I'll show you *strength*!" he said. He ran behind a bush and returned quickly with a gun. He pointed the gun at the elephant and fired. BANG! And the elephant fell over. Dead. Dead. Man jumped up and down excitedly, shouting "*Strength*! Wasn't *that* strength?"

Suddenly all the animals were gone. They had fled into the forest. "Strength . . ." said man, but there was no one to hear him.

36

Deep in the jungle, the animals huddled together and whispered. "Did you see that? Was that strength?" "No," they decided that was *not* strength, "that was *Death*. That was *Death*!"

Since that day, the animals will not walk with man. When man comes to the jungle, he must walk alone. And the animals still talk of man . . . that creature, man. The one who cannot tell the difference between strength and Death.

Sharing. Adapted from a story told by Rebecca Hilliard in 1952.

During the Great Depression, food was scarce. Many people left their homes in search of better opportunities and had to deal with survival on the road. Driven by hunger, one wanderer came upon a gathering of poor homeless travelers. Each had a little bit of food and was hoarding it for his or her own use. Now, this traveler borrowed a bucket of water, placed a large stone in the bottom, and proceeded to boil the water over the community fire. The other people saw what he was doing and asked curiously, "Why are you boiling that rock?"

"I'm makin' stone soup," he replied.

Someone said, "Well, that can't taste very good."

"That's true," said the traveler, "if we only had a piece of potato to add, it would improve the flavor." Someone offered half a potato, and it went into the pot.

"Still," the traveler said, "it would taste even better with a piece of carrot or onion." And before you could say "soup's on," people stepped forward and put both of these into the bucket.

As the soup warmed, the aroma enticed others to the fire; and soon the whole group was waiting to taste the

soup. When it was done, they shared it; and all swore that "stone soup" was the best they'd ever tasted.

The End of Our Story

We close with another true story from Rebecca Hilliard, a storyteller whose spirit still lives through the stories she passed on to her children. Sharing stories, Mrs. Hilliard would say, is our gift to each other, a gift of caring and sharing.

A Story of Caring and Sharing. As told by Rebecca Hilliard to her grandson.

> During the Great Depression, travelers were common and often came knocking at our door. We had very little, but daddy would ask mama if she could add another potato to the pot. On one occasion, a man came to the door carrying his duffle and an ax. Daddy was a bit put off, but told him he could come in. But he would have to leave the ax outside the door. After supper, daddy told the man he could sleep in the barn's hayloft for the night. Early the next morning, when daddy went to milk the cow and do the chores, the man was gone. But stacked neatly near the barn was a rick of firewood.

Young adolescents understand the character-building lessons of caring and sharing in this story. They also learn something in the affective domain about the Depression of the 1930s.

39

Stories are like clay. They can be worked and reworked to meet the needs of teachers and learners at the middle level. In the hands of a creative, caring teacher, a story will always be a powerful tool for sculpting young minds. The rest of this story is up to you!

40

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46

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Deaf students at the Alexander Graham Bell School in Cleveland, Ohio, enjoy reading in this early 20th century class.

Courtesy of the Cleveland Public Library Photograph Collection.